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University Fine Arts Gallery

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University of Tasmania

Sculpture Painting

BROAD AND STEPHENSON

An exhibition of works by:-

RODNEY BROAD : SCULPTURE
PETER STEPHENSON : PAINTING AND DRAWINGS

University Fine Arts Gallery
University of Tasmania
June 13 – July 5, 1984

LIST OF WORKS

RODNEY BROAD

- 1 IRON RAINBOW
Media: copper, iron, stone, wood, quartz crystal
- 2 WORKING MODEL FOR A DOUBTFUL SYSTEM
OF BELIEFS
Media: iron, wax, quartz crystal, lavender
- 3 SUNRISE – SUNSET – INCUBATOR
Media: wood, glass marble, metals
- 4 THE LAST CHRISTMAS (installation)
Media: concrete, wood, metal, gelatine, earth, toys
- 5 NATURE – INFORMATION – WORK
Media: stone, iron, pollen
- 6 VOLCANO – FLUX – RESOLUTION – FLUX
Media: bronze, wood, iron
- 7 A DOG CONSIDERS A CLOUD
Media: concrete, stone

PETER STEPHENSON

ENNEODOS SERIES oil on canvas

- 1 190 x 150cms
- 2 190 x 150cms
- 3 190 x 150cms
- 5 180 x 180cms
- 6 182.5 x 182.5cms (illustration)
- 7 199 x 182cms
- 8 199 x 182cms
- 9 177.5 x 177.5cms
- 10 152 x 179cms

ENNEODOS SERIES pastel on paper

- A. 750 x 100cms
- B. 750 x 100cms
- C. 750 x 100cms
- D. 750 x 100cms
- E. 750 x 100cms
- F. 750 x 100cms

In our supposedly pluralist society where the alleged equality of all and everything is continually emphasised, there exist outposts of resistance yet to succumb. In this ENNEODOS series of paintings and drawings Peter Stephenson occupies such an outpost and the presence of the complete series permits us to investigate totally whether the position is worth holding.

ENNEODOS is a mythical site in Ancient Greece. Here, Phyllis died of grief after waiting 9 days at the place of appointment for her lover Acamus, (son of Theseus). Phyllis was metamorphosed by Athena to an almond tree, and Acamus arrived the following day.

"All he had to embrace was her rough bark. In response to his caresses the tree burst into blossom."

Another metamorphosis is that of Carya, beloved of Dionysius and changed by him to a walnut tree. Carytid columns are so named from their representation of this at the Temple of Artemis Caryatis.

The idea of these works did not occur to the artist when he was in Greece last year but materialised (metamorphosed?) for him between watches at sea in the waters of South-West Tasmania as he read the mythology of Classical Greece. Figurative painting has never been far from his conceptions, but being a reactive artist, he works hard at ignoring the familiar. He speaks of the compelling image which appeared in a Berlin newspaper of the political hostage Peter Lorenz, held captive by the Bader-Meinhoff group. The victim cowered in a lower corner whilst the anonymous cellar wall was marked indistinctly with either graffiti or plumbing. This contrasted extraordinarily with a press photo several days later of the released Lorenz striding triumphantly along the boulevard, smiling, dapper, groomed. To the artist the first crude Polaroid conveyed completely the message of the drama under way – the figure lonely, contained, depressed.

When questioned on the reasons an Antipodean artist would have for referring to classical antiquity in contemporary times, Peter Stephenson expressed the thought that there were relevant psychological parallels precisely articulated for which he had need. The more readily available Australian mythologies were in many instances too close for comfort, and perhaps lacked the very precision of their classical equivalents.

In his formative years as a painter, the artist acknowledges a limited debt to the abstract expressionist mode he saw and practised. This permitted him to understand the facility or paint and to experience both its productive aspect and its counter-productive aspect. Generally speaking he felt a disquiet about the general subject matter of those times and concedes now in hindsight that there has been a recurring figurative imagery which he has frequently resisted. This ENNEODOS series therefore marks his present engagement with the figure, but the artist marks his respect and partial allegiance to abstract expressionism in the image of bark, its colour, texture and shape.

The paintings generally offer an all too rare insight into the nature of painting as a process. The word itself describes the manipulation of pigment. It can embrace no more than that, however overloaded the implications of the art form may be. Stephenson feels that in this regard Brett Whiteley, for example, too often relaxes his discipline and resorts to drawing in colour, exploiting a contrived and repetitious line. As will be obvious from the paintings there is precious little seduction by line in Stephenson's work. Sure, the gestures of the draughtsman are there in abundance, but they serve that network of pigment which elaborates form and space – two elements impossible to intelligently depict in linear terms.

This very element is, I believe, one of the great strengths of the artist's work – firstly his conscious recognition that his manoeuvres are confined to a two dimensional surface and that there is a limit to illusionist devices offering apparently endless

space. Having accepted the limitations of implied space, the special skill of this artist is to create and explore with infinite reckless use of some of the most outlaw colours imaginable: Prussian blue, veridian, cerulean blue, cadmium barium, Indian yellow. This almost profligate colour speaks strongly to me of place, but not of this hemisphere.

To see just how it works, examine No.7 in the painting series. The vertical space on the left of the canvas is composed of a warp and weft of at least six colours, their individual identities taken almost to the point of no return. But not quite – the hand has been steadied at the right time and the rush to oblivion halted. Exactly the same instinct for survival, born of skill, is to be found in No.6, in the orange passage of paint on the left. Examine again the intricacies of colour modulation which have been attained in this area – we are still speaking of the gesture of the draughtsman, but as the servant of the painter. The contract for this draughtsman is about space, (aerial space, not infinite formal space), and colour.

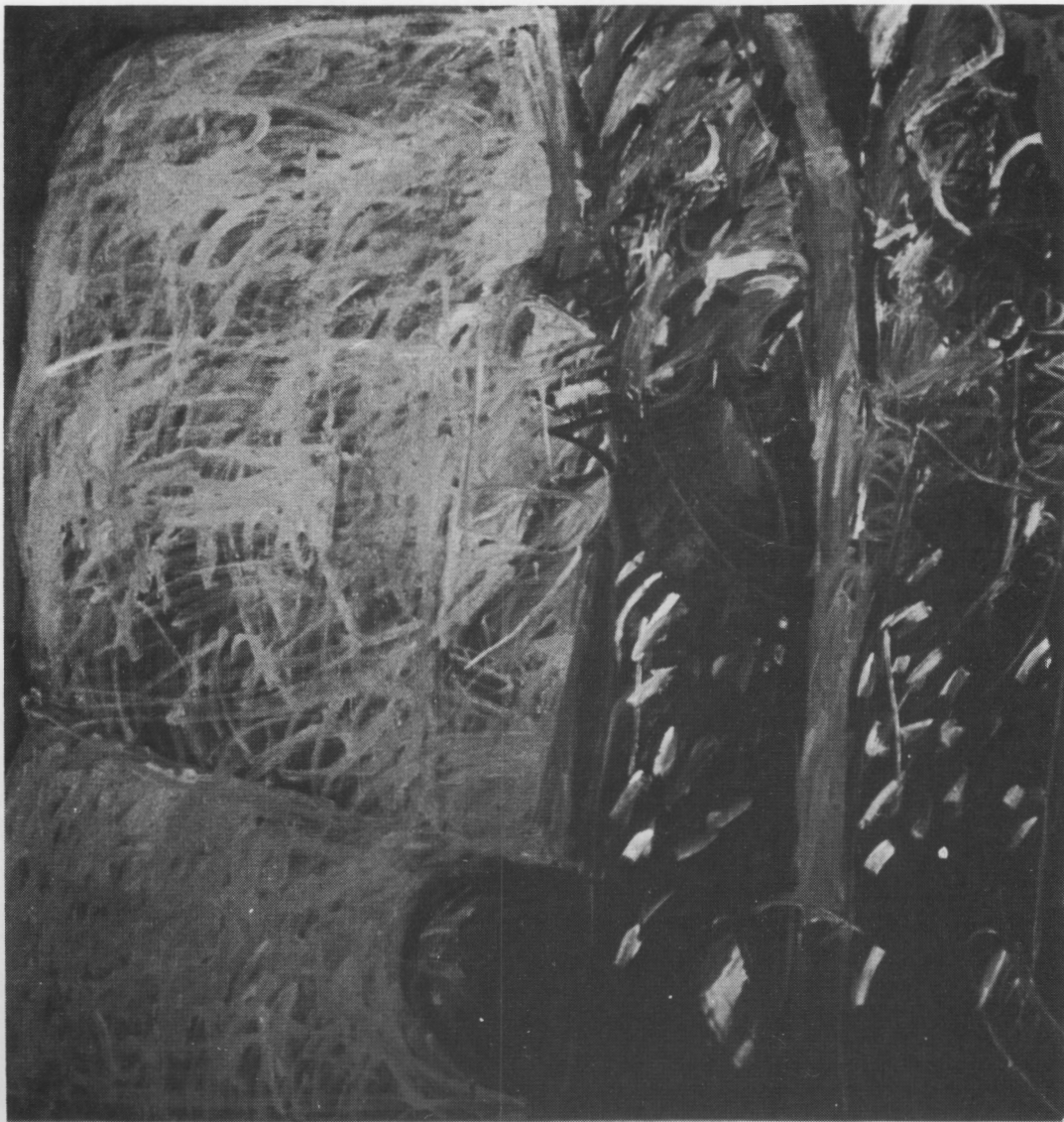
Controversy rules supreme when one raises the topic of the artist's responsibilities for ambiguity. Whilst not quite a matter of ethics, the use and abuse of ambiguity is something acknowledged by responsible artists. So that in the matter of imagery the artist must strike precisely the right note – neither dogmatic nor elusive to the point of obscurity. Not to be forgotten is that what we speak of ultimately is creative imagination, hopefully at its richest. It is in that region where lies the intimations of our mortality and its consolations, so that the alert artist dare not put a foot wrong or we will find him out instinctively.

In this regard take note of the blade forms, thorn-like from the figure/tree in No.1, and the echoes of these triangular forms in No.5 insistent, enigmatic but by no means passive, this minimal form exerts a startling authority in its context, indeed in No.1, it establishes the character of the work. No.8 relies on a totally different format of image. Here there are topographic hints of place, (ENNEODOS perhaps?) more sensed than specific, yet gently endorsed by the one single vertical element of river/figure/tree? All three read well in this relaxed but sombre landscape – take your choice, they each fit.

Again in Stephenson's work yet another recurring image, the graffiti, sometimes illegible, sometimes discernible. Here, through the whole series the Greek ΕΝΝΕΟΔΟΣ (ENNEODOS). In No.3 as almost a neon sign placed upright, otherwise hinted at in No.2. The very letters themselves permit the artist to allude to other marks throughout the paintings, deft, light and delicate. At risk of overstating the case, I would have you refer back to No.7. There are two brushstrokes of extreme delicacy over the form on the right of the painting, possibly the last marks made on the work. In their general emphasis, note their countering of the whole muscular movement of the entire left of the work, like the retrospective analysis of some long forgotten battle.

Having got so close to the details of the artist's work, this may prove an appropriate place to survey precisely what has been accomplished. With an economy of means, paint and canvas, the artist has achieved his objective in speculating on time, place and circumstance in the drama he is examining. At a time when innovative experimental artforms are strident in their claims on our attention, this exhibition reminds us that paint on canvas is still capable of that economy of means whereby ideas may be passed effortlessly from mind to mind. Painting does not have to justify its existence, now or ever. We often need reminding of that, and during the rough and tumble of events, in the hands of a persuasive artist pure paint has not lost its potency.

Peter Taylor



Peter Stephenson: Title: Enneodos Series No.6 Oil on Canvas 181.5 x 181.5cms

PETER STEPHENSON

Born 1943, Ormond, Victoria
1961-70 Served with the Royal Australian Navy, Vietnam

STUDIED

1971-74 Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1975 Goethe Institute, Canberra
1977 Gallery One, Hobart
1981 Salamanca Arts Festival Exhibition, Long Gallery, Salamanca Place, Hobart

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1973 *Contemporary Art*, Gallery Two, Salamanca Place Gallery, Hobart
1976 The University of Tasmania Fine Arts Committee Collection, Fine Arts Gallery, University Centre, Sandy Bay
Paintings, Prints and Drawings by Tasmanian Artists, Coughton Galleries, Hobart
1976/77 *Blue Gum Festival*, Purchase Exhibition, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
1977 George's Invitation Prize Exhibition, George's Gallery, Melbourne
Art Acquisitions 1975-77, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
1979 *Tasmanian Contemporary Drawing*, Fine Arts Gallery, University Centre, Sandy Bay
Capital Permanent Acquisitions Exhibition, Geelong Art Gallery, Victoria

1980 *Works on Paper*, Burnie Art Gallery
Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne, with Roy Jackson
1981 *Drawings*, Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne, with Michael Kearsey and Peter Maloney
1982 *Flights of Fantasy*, Hobart, Salamanca Festival Exhibition, Long Gallery, Salamanca Place, Hobart

REPRESENTED

Goethe Institute, Hamburg, Germany
National Gallery of Victoria
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
Burnie Art Gallery
Devonport Gallery and Art Centre
University of Tasmania
Artbank
Covett-Brewster Gallery, New Zealand
Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board

GRANTS, AWARDS

1975-76 German Academic Exchange Scholarship, Hamburg State Art School, Germany
1981 Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board, Professional Living Allowance

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Peter Taylor, "Liberation from the Shadow of our Past", *The Mercury*, 27 Nov. 1981
Peter Taylor, 'Contemporary Tasmanian Drawing', *Island Magazine*, July 1979

Since belief has ceased that a God broadly directs the destinies of the world and that [.....] is leading mankind gloriously upward, man has set himself ecumenical goals embracing the whole earth. The former morality, namely Kant's demanded of the individual actions which one desired of all men: that was a very naive thing; as if everyone knew without further ado what mode of action would benefit the whole of mankind, that is, what actions at all are desirable; it is a theory presupposing that universal harmony *must* result of itself in accordance with innate laws of progress.¹

In his article 'The Function of History in Nineteenth Century Culture', Morse Peckham argues that alienation* was the emergent problem of the nineteenth century (and a major factor in the development of theories of cultural transcendence in the latter part of the century).² The argument goes that in philosophy, in historiography, in the emerging social sciences, and in the arts, the advanced and advancing thought of the nineteenth century can be understood as lying along a continuum between two poles – one being historicizing the culture and the other being historicizing the personality, and he goes on to say:

Each instance in the continuum has its roots in the perception of *incoherence* within the individual's own culture, or within a special instance of his (*or her*) culture or his (*or her*) personality. The perception of the incoherence is the source of alienation.³

(Hollingdale points out that in Nietzsche's case, the continuing tension between the nihilist and the transcendent aspects of what became 'Nietzsche's Philosophy' prevent it from hardening into a dogmatic doctrine – it remains to the end an experiment in reorienting oneself within a world of total uncertainty).⁴

Three notions bedded in the above seem to offer a guide of some substance to the thinking behind Rodney Broad's sculpture. The three notions are: the rejection of theory that presupposes that universal harmony must result, *ipso facto*, in accordance with innate laws of progress; the perception of incoherences within *any* individual's own culture (and of the alienation which inexorably occurs once the perception is generated); and the belief that the humanities and more specifically the visual arts can offer by experiment a way of reorienting oneself within a world of total uncertainty. (There are no absolute truths – the work of art can be said to be the artist's *true statement* if you like, and it can offer a provisional fix in an inchoate world but it is only *true* for the artist; for the viewer the same work of art *may* offer an *explanation* for why things are the way they are, but it is nothing more than that, an explanation).

In 1971, Broad settled in Sydney, two years after completing his training in Christchurch, New Zealand. He later moved to Hobart to take up a teaching position at the Tasmanian School of Art (1972). A skilled bronze caster and (one might say) an adept, he has told of his abiding interest in the life sciences – physics, chemistry and biology – formed very early in the piece. And this has clearly determined his sculptural practice both in material and theoretical terms. This has been combined with an equally strong commitment to archaeology and its study (the 'systematic description' and 'scientific study' of antiquities and relics) – and both concerns have been insistently evident in his sculpture of the past decade. He has described his fascination with the life sciences and their methodology as a *subterfuge* (a quixotic quest for 'truth', a lofty search for ideals where there is only illusion and disillusion?), but nevertheless the *properties* of things, the particularities of scientific definition and of investigation, the specificities of *naming* and of *classification* seem to have provided a working methodology for the recent sculpture even if the *results*, because of the nature of the elements combined, are not empirical.

This lack of empiricism should not be seen as bad science, a pseudo-scientific experiment gone haywire; rather it is an avowed ideological position and concerns the nature of scientific explanation. The twentieth century in particular has shown us that all scientific explanations are provisional. They are not universal truths but merely arrangements of facts, placed in such a way that they help to position human beings in some kind of relationship to one another and to an inchoate world. The methodology employed here, therefore (the selection of [usually] highly charged elements, their naming and the implied and actual experimentation with the reaction of elements to one another) is a marked aspect of Broad's recent work.

Theories, historical events, phenomena, myths and legends and scientific procedures are stripped down (distilled if you like) and where necessary given a visual analogy or symbolised: they are arranged.

Two examples will have to suffice: although neither are in the present exhibition. *Incident at Riga* (1980) combines, among other things, an image of naked Jewish women being herded into a mass grave for execution, with a gold ring, a clown on a donkey, a barbed wire club used to drive cattle and a child's towel. Here the relationship between the principal elements seems to be reasonably overt (other works of Broad's can be very hermetic): the barbarity of the historical event is graphically realised and linked with gold (one of the 'fruits' of the exterminations) which, in an extraordinarily compressed mnemonic, itself generates layer upon layer of allusions ranging from the futile if compulsive alchemical search for a recipe for gold, to its use as a principal source of material wealth and power as well as a symbol of ownership and domination; the child's towel (the artist's daughter's) becomes a relic of a time of innocence, now lost; the archaic barbed club, a reminder that the barbarity of the recent past (Riga, *et al.*) is not unique; the clown and the ass, the guileless child of nature and the equally guileless beast, the symbols of the dominated.

Another example, *External Recurrence* (*Ewige Wiederkunft*), 1982, which was exhibited at the *Flights of Fantasy* exhibition in Hobart in 1982, combines a three dimensional still life *a la Morandi* and a wheelbarrow with heads, a 'basket' of human potentialities, named heads – Oscar, of *The Tin Drum*, Herod, Achilles, the Etruscan and the Dictator. Here still life becomes an emblem for a world in stasis; the heads, symbols of the various ways in which human beings can act upon the world.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the apparent ungainliness of a number of the works (their lack of formal beauty) seems to square with Broad's almost palpable sense of alienation. Clearly he has eschewed neat formal solutions: he has talked instead of 'things working visually' and this is a far cry from the formalist works he executed in the early 1970's; latterly, one is aware of his attempt to set up an arrangement of 'things', the visual logic of which is more often than not triggered in the viewer's memory (the artist is dependent upon the viewers to generate for themselves many of the more *literary* associations). The very best of the works have the quality of visual aphorisms, aphorisms of an artist carrying out experiments in reorienting himself within a world of total uncertainty.

Jonathan Holmes

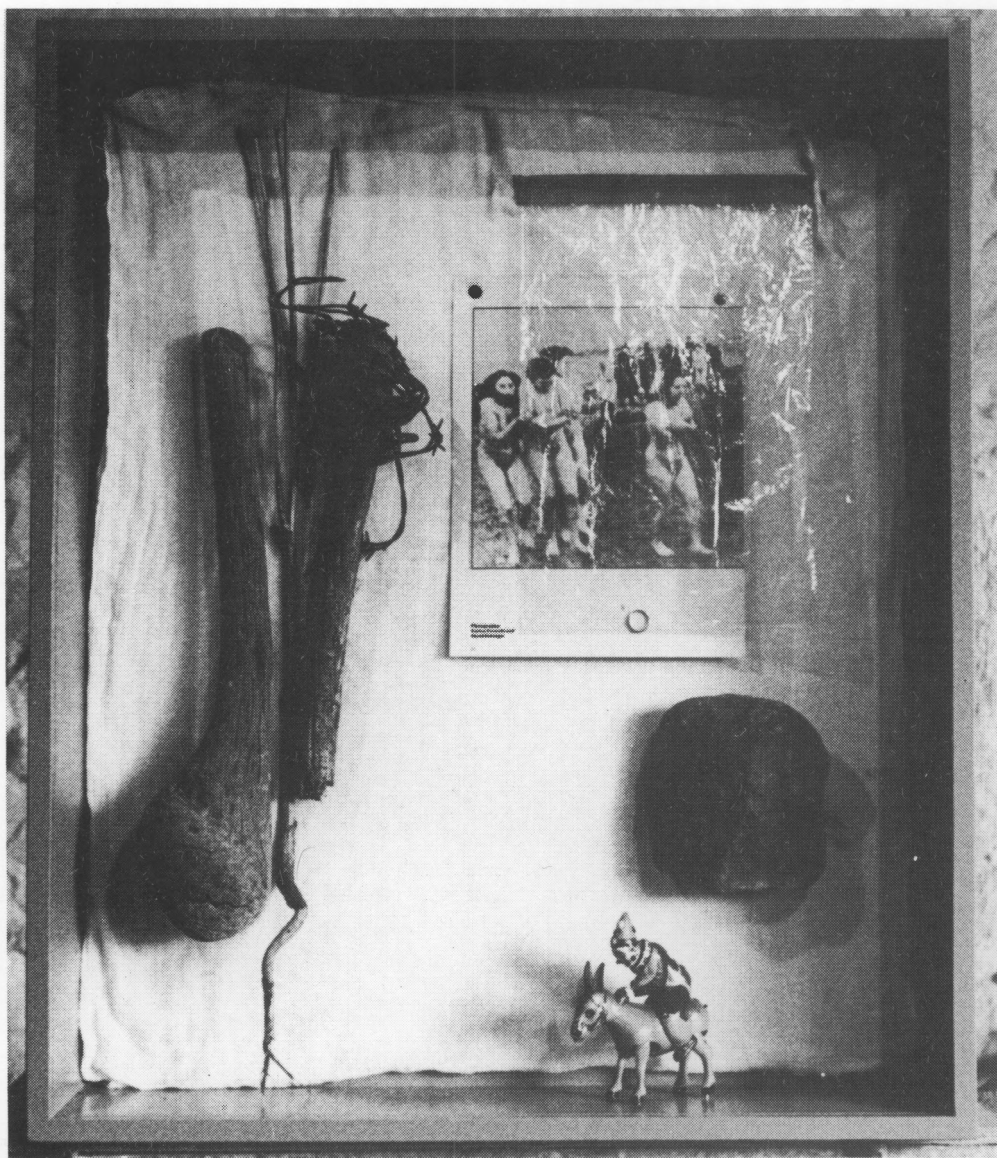
* Alienation understood as the perception of incoherence which emerges when the norms of logic are judged to be failing, or at least inapplicable.

1. Nietzsche, F., *HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN*, 1878, p.25; extracts reprinted in *A NIETZSCHE READER* (sel. and trans. by R. Hollingdale), Penguin, 1977.

2. Peckham, M., 'The Function of History in Nineteenth Century European Thought', reprinted in his *ROMANTICISM AND BEHAVIOUR*, Columbia, University of Carolina Press, 1978 (My Italics).

3. *ibid.*, p.39.

4. *op.cit.*, p.11.



Rodney Broad: Title: Incident at Riga Mixed Media (*not in this exhibition*)

RODNEY BROAD

Born 1947, Dannevirke, New Zealand

STUDIED

- 1965-68 Diploma of Fine Art with University of Canterbury, New Zealand, Honours in Sculpture
1969 Teachers College, Christchurch, New Zealand

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1970 Contemporary Art Society Gallery, Christchurch
1972 Fine Arts Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart
1973 Devonport Art Gallery
1974 Devonport Art Gallery
1975 Bowerbank Mill Gallery, Deloraine, Tasmania

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1969 Two-person Exhibition, Christchurch
1970 *Nine Canterbury Artists*, New Vision Gallery, Auckland
1971 *New Zealand Contemporaries*, Auckland City Art Gallery
1972 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Purchase Exhibition
1973 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Purchase Exhibition
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery Purchase Exhibition
1974 Commonwealth Games Exhibition, Christchurch
Two-Man Show, Adelaide Festival
1975 Mildura Sculpture Exhibition
1976 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Purchase Exhibition
Blue Gum Festival, Purchase Exhibition, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

- 1977 *Blue Gum Festival*, Purchase Exhibition, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
Joint Exhibition, Bowerbank Mill Gallery, Deloraine, Tasmania
1978 Mildura Sculpture Triennial
1980 *Works by Lecturers from the Tasmanian School of Art*, Tasmanian School of Art Gallery, Hobart
Recent Tasmanian Sculpture and 3-Dimensional Art, Hobart and Launceston
1982 *Flights of Fantasy*, Hobart

COLLECTIONS

Christchurch City Art Gallery
Christchurch Teachers College
University of Canterbury, New Zealand
University of Tasmania, Hobart
Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board
McClelland Gallery, Victoria
Mildura Sculpture Centre
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston
Burnie Art Gallery
Rosny College, Hobart
The Examiner, Launceston

COMMISSIONS

- 1973 University of Tasmania Bio-Medical Library, Barnett Memorial, Hobart

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Scarlett, K., *Australian Sculptors*, Melbourne, 1980
Moffat, T., 'Recent Sculpture in Christchurch', *Ascent*, 1969
Davies, J., 'Earth and Steel: Mildura's Seventh Sculpture Triennial', *Art in Australia*, Vol.16, No.1 (Sept. 1978), p.46
Ian McLean, *The Mercury*, 1982

**THIS EXHIBITION WAS PREPARED BY
THE FINE ARTS COMMITTEE
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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INTRODUCTIONS:** Jonathan Holmes
Peter Taylor

**CATALOGUE
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AND PRINTING:** Jon Williamson

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ERRATA

RODNEY BROAD – RECENT SCULPTURE

Para. 7, second column, line 1, should read:

Another example, *Eternal Recurrence* (*Ewige Wieder-*